

Series Authority Control: Potential Effects of Library of Congress' Decision on Users at  
The Ohio State University

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## Abstract

Following the decision of the Library of Congress (LC) to discontinue series authority control, many libraries were left with an important decision to make—should they continue creating series authority records, prepare to create more than ever, or abandon the practice altogether? Every library must make its own decision, and this study investigates how the Ohio State University Libraries (OSUL) tackled the question by asking the users what they need and use for work and research. The purpose of this study is to understand how the LC's decision affects users' ability at the OSUL to search by series. A survey was sent to a random sample of students, faculty, staff, and librarians to determine whether the Cataloging Department should follow the LC's decision or continue its current practice. This paper reports the results of the survey and OSUL's decision.

## <1>Introduction

On April 20, 2006, the Library of Congress announced that as of May 1, 2006, it

would cease creating Series Authority Records (SARs) as part of LC cataloging practice.

[1] Reaction to LC's decision to discontinue controlling series came from almost the entire library community, including the American Library Association (ALA) and its Sections. [2] The Board of the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS), a division of ALA, presented a resolution on LC's series authority decision at the 2006 ALA Annual Meeting held in New Orleans, Louisiana. In addition, ALCTS added a forum to the program at that meeting devoted to the discussion of this decision.

[3] A petition to prevent LC from abandoning the creation of SARs was written by Sanchez and Bratton. [4] This petition was signed by 3,495 librarians across the globe. The University of Missouri-Columbia Libraries' Cataloging Department devoted a Web page to LC's decision titled, "Tracing Series and Maintaining Series Authority Records—News about the Library of Congress Decisions." [5]

With this decision, libraries and organizations were left to determine how to handle series authority work. The Online Library Computer Center (OCLC) announced changes in their process to assist in maintaining controlled series access in WorldCat records. [6] The Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) series policy remained the same and encouraged member libraries to continue with SARs if they see value in them. [7]

The Director of Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access stated that indexing and keyword access would provide adequate access to series statements only in the 490 field. [8] Keyword searching seems like a good solution. Most users perform simple keyword searches today when they search the Web. [9] However, the search may result in thousands of retrievals, and the searchers often do not look beyond one or two screens.

[10] The problem is that keyword searching often brings up a number of unrelated items that the user must investigate. The larger the number of results, the greater the confusion, especially if the keywords are common words found in a series title, such as Bulletin, Report, or Publication.

If most users do not use advanced search options or look beyond a few screens on an Internet search, how much time are they willing to spend sorting a keyword search in a library's online catalog? Having a series title controlled and searchable appears to be a more efficient use of users' time and a more rewarding experience. While clearly series authority control has value, with LC's decision, more of the burden now falls to libraries and other associated institutions. Even if some of the work of authority control is done through a vendor, corrections and updates still remain to be done by staff within a library.

In the OSUL's online catalog, series is not indexed separately. It is combined with the title index. Therefore, if users search the online catalog for a series, they must search by title or keyword. Since serving the user is important to OSUL, determining if series searching and series authority control is crucial to their researching needs is essential. In this study, the authors decided to survey OSUL users to examine how the community it serves uses the title or the keyword index in the catalog to retrieve information by series. A survey was constructed and sent to undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and librarians. This paper reports the results of the survey and the OSUL decision based on the analysis of the survey.

Authority control provides a standard for headings such as names, subjects, uniform titles, and series that serve as access points in bibliographic records. Gorman stated that bibliographic control is impossible without authority control and that cataloging cannot exist without standardized access points that are provided by authority control. [11] Clack summarized authority control as, “the process of ensuring that every entry—name, uniform title, series, or subject—that is selected as an access point for the public catalog is unique and does not conflict, by being identical, with any other entry that is already in the catalog or that may be included at a later date. A network of references is the frame that holds it all together.” [12]

In discussing the purpose of the catalog, Wilson pointed out that authority control exists to fulfill one of the purposes of showing what items share a common characteristic. She went on to say that it is not possible to be certain that all materials sharing a common characteristic are displayed in one place without authority control. [13] Wilson stated that “authority control then is concerned with those access points which can be shared by multiple bibliographic entities, and series by definition fall within that category.” [14]

Clack further discussed the importance of consistency in series authority files for access and retrieval. [15] For Clack, consistency of treatment meant “all parts of a series follow the same treatment whether the decision is to group them all under the series title, classify them together as a collection, or disperse them throughout the collection. Ensuring uniformity in treatment is the function of series authority control.” [16] Clack felt that since it is not possible to predict how users would search, every identifiable series is a useful access point and that an authority record should be made for every series title for proper collocation and linkage. [17]

Given how different users perform their searches, the consistency of a series title is extremely important for useful search results. Shemberg's article focused on the problems of indexing issues versus how the items are cataloged. [18] In examining the series *New Directions for Community Colleges* (NDCC), she found issues around identifying the example series. Various problems are associated with identifying the sample, including the inconsistency in cataloging treatments due to human error, local decisions over time as to cataloging the item as a serial, a monograph in a series, or both, and the indexing of the series field or not. Shemberg searched various online catalogs by series title. One search resulted in three serial records and no monographic records. However, by performing a search by each issue title, all issues of the series were found. In this situation, the library did not have a series title search option, thus limiting the search to knowing the title or to keyword searching. In her concluding remarks, Shemberg suggested that indexing series entries, adding series entries, and having more series analyzed with dual numbering schemes recorded would reduce the work of the user.

Of concern for any authority work is the value to users. Do the users take advantage of the cross-references offered to them when they perform searches? This is the question that McCurley and Weisbrod of Auburn University investigated. [19] They were interested in the value of cross-references in a series authority records when they made them available to users in their searches. They felt that the best way to attain bibliographic control over monographic series is by a well-designed authority file that provides a consistent, established form of the title with treatment of the series and with

cross-references. The results of the study showed that the cross-references for series titles are used. This is confirmed by the number of redirects. As the number of cross-references in the database rose, the number of redirects increased indicating that the cross-references are not only encountered but also followed. The study also showed that the cross-references for the sciences and technology are used more than other subject areas.

Along with the discussion by ALCTS and the petition by Sanchez and Bratton, LC's decision was also a catalyst for reaction editorials and articles. With the reaction from Technical Service based groups, also came discussion from Public Service Librarians. Mann's discussion covered much ground, but his main point was the impact the decision will have on patrons everywhere, not just at LC. [20] Mitchell and Watstein explored the ramifications of the LC's decision to discontinue SARs on those librarians who work on reference and teach library services. [21] Donlan even suggested that the administrators that were willing to streamline Technical Services staff earlier might now have to "add back a cataloger or two." [22] The discussion of how the users may feel about the LC decision raised the point of this study—to determine if the current practice of OSUL effectively meets the needs of users and what users of a large, academic library think of the LC decision.

## <1>Institutional Background: Current Practices for Handling Series at the Ohio State University Libraries

The OSUL follows rules for series from the Anglo American Cataloging Rules, second revised edition (AACR2rev.) and also consults Library of Congress Rule

Interpretations (LCRI) for some situations. [23,24] At the OSUL, there is a problem with consistency in the current series practice. Although following AACR2rev.'s lead is an informal rule, no concrete local rules or documentation apply to the creation of SARs for original cataloging. For original records that include a series, recording and tracing a series is required. If a SAR does not exist for a series, a cataloger should create one. Often, catalogers consult the library catalog online to see what was done in the past instead of going to the authority file; mistakes are often perpetuated instead of being corrected.

At OSUL, tracing series is not required; however, for copy catalogers guidelines exist for how to handle series in OCLC records. They are required to check that the series is present in the record and add it if it is on the piece but not in the OCLC record. Checking for spelling errors, typos, and number of skip characters is also required. There is no mention of checking the series authority or creating new SARs if needed. Because much of the copy used for cataloging is DLC, when the Library of Congress stopped tracing series, in many cases so did OSUL's copy catalogers.

For OSU publications, a SAR is required if it does not already exist; however, this does not always occur, or the record is not always updated when changes occur in the publication information. For example, in a recent retrospective conversion project, some SARs were discovered that did not follow a change in title or include the full cross-references needed. In some cases, OSU publications did not have SARs and new ones were created.

OSUL outsources the authority control to Backstage Library Works authority processing. Backstage is a commercial vendor that provides names, subject headings,



uniform titles, and series authority control. Every month, OSUL collects all the new headings and sends them to Backstage for post-cataloging authority control. Backstage sends monthly reports for all headings, but the Unmatched Primary Headings Series report is of primary concern for series work. These reports alert the database maintenance team at OSUL that 490, 440, and 830 headings did not match an existing SAR, or the headings did not exactly match a SAR (if OSUL did not provide the correct heading).

From the problems that come back on reports, SARs are not created on a regular basis, and the series authority file is not consulted by catalogers on a consistent basis. The database maintenance team is then responsible for cleaning up the incomplete or incorrect bibliographic records, which is time-consuming and not practical for the limited staff available.

Another matter that complicates the situation is the current practice of indexing the 490\_0 (series statement) field in the database. Because the 490 field is indexed, it appears to the user on the OPAC as though it is traced. Although this may seem like it would solve the problem of whether to trace or not to trace, it actually calls for further analysis. Depending on the vendor and administrative decisions, any library could decide to forgo indexing 490 fields at any time. If the decision is made to stop tracing series altogether because these fields are indexed, then the decision would need to be revisited in the future if the indexing rules change.

## <1>Research Method

To understand how users' respond to the LC's decision on series treatment and

how this effects the ability to search by series, the authors considered conducting focus groups or an online survey. An online survey was found to be the most appropriate tool both to collect data and reach a larger number of users and return results in a timely fashion.

In preparation, the authors looked at some tips on how to distribute the survey via the Internet and how to obtain high result. [25] Based on the information gathered from these tips, the survey was brief (nine questions), confidential, as clear as possible, and users were not required to scroll down through the survey but could click through to the next question (see Appendix A). Some questions in the survey required a yes or no response. All questions, however, were designed to offer opportunity for comments and opinions.

The survey was sent to undergraduate and graduate students; faculty and staff; and library staff (including faculty and staff working at the OSUL). The authors considered the library staff as users of the catalog, because they serve the campus community; these respondents make up Group 3. Questions 1 and 2 were general in nature, but the intention was to gather information on the participants and to identify if they are using OSUL's online catalog (OSCAR) to search for information.

After creating the questionnaire, it was sent to external experienced librarians in series authority control for comments and advice. This step was particularly important and helped in rephrasing the questions to make them clear to non-librarians. In addition, the questionnaire was given to ten students working in the Cataloging Department for their comments on clarity.

To determine the sample for the survey, the authors used the OSU's Statistical

Summary showing the enrollment for students and the number of faculty and staff. [26]

The statistics for Autumn Quarter 2006 reported 59,091 students and 25,302 faculty and staff. The student statistics include undergraduates and graduate students. The faculty statistics include regular, clinical, research, and auxiliary faculty; administrative and professional staff; and civil service staff. The questionnaire was distributed via e-mail, and the student and faculty and staff directories were consulted to obtain the e-mail addresses. Since the directories were published separately, the sample was divided into three groups: 1) undergraduate and graduate students, 2) faculty and staff, and 3) library faculty and staff.

The sample size for the first two groups was determined using a random sample calculator for each of the groups [27]. The Ohio State University had 59,091 students and graduate students on campus. The random sample calculator suggested that 1,019 respondents were needed in order to obtain a 99 percent confidence. To gather the 1,019 respondents, the survey was sent to 2,038 undergraduate and graduate students. For the faculty and staff, the total on campus was 25,902, so 996 respondents were needed to gain a 99 percent confidence rating. To obtain the 996 respondents, the survey was sent to 1,192 faculty and staff. The authors over sampled for Group 1 and Group 2 in an attempt to ensure the confidence level. For the third group, the survey was sent to all library staff and faculty (342 members) via the library online listserv to determine if controlling or not controlling the series would affect their work and the way they serve patrons.

For Groups 1 and 2, after determining the sample size, a random sample generator was used to select individuals within each group. A list of numbers was created and

sorted in ascending order to facilitate the access to e-mail address in the directories. A student was hired to use the list of numbers against the directories and obtain e-mail addresses. The survey was sent separately to each group. Appendix B shows the e-mail invitation that was sent to the three groups. The survey was open for two weeks. A reminder e-mail was sent a few days before the survey closed to notify respondents that the survey would be open for an extra week.

All individuals had the option to decline the survey. From all the groups, 6 students and 2 faculty or staff declined. Eighteen out-of-office responses were received from Group 2. Problems with bounced messages occurred more than expected. Overall, 69 of Group 2's and 32 of Group 1's survey messages bounced back because of typos in the e-mail addresses. These typos were corrected and sent back. However, no survey was declined or bounced back from group 3.

Another problem that was anticipated was bounced messages from e-mail boxes being over quota. Twenty-seven e-mail messages from Group 1 and 37 e-mail messages from Group 2 were bounced back because e-mail boxes were full. Again, reminder messages were re-sent to these individuals. Twenty other messages bounced back without explanation. Two students responded back that they did not use OSCAR at all, so they did not take the survey.

Another issue that occurred was a problem with the responses themselves. The survey was set to allow respondents to answer a question and leave a comment; however, some respondents complained (in the comment box) that the survey would only allow them to either respond or leave a comment—not both. These problems were resolved in the data collection and analysis stage.

## <1>Findings and Discussion

In analyzing the data, the authors found that the number of respondents was very low in Group 1 and 2 and not satisfying in Group 3. As Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece stated, “There is very little researchers can do to persuade someone to participate if he/she simply prefers not to participate” in a survey. [28] The authors suggested also that a high-response rate reflects a cohesive survey group, which this random chosen group did not have. Although all persons surveyed were affiliated with OSU and potential library catalog users (and series users), these attributes were not enough to create a shared community with a stake in responding to the survey. Figure 1 shows the disparity between what was needed for a confidentiality rating and what survey results were returned. The sample size is illustrated in the first column. The second column shows the number of respondents needed to meet the confidentiality rate. The last column illustrates how many people actually responded to the survey. Although the confidentiality rate was not reached, the authors decided to analyze the data received and found it useful to make a decision based on the small response rate.

[insert Figure 1 here]

Group 1 had an overall response rate of 4.9 percent. Table 1 shows that a total of 100 surveys out of 2,038 were completed (63 percent undergraduate and 37 percent graduates). Group 2 had a 4.7 percent overall response rate. A total of 56 surveys out of

1,192 were completed. Of the 56 surveys returned, 35.7 percent were faculty and 64.3 percent were staff. Group 3 (library staff members and library faculty) had the highest response rate at 25.7 percent overall of the 342 subscribers to the OSUL listserv. The information in Table 1 reveals that 58 percent of the respondents were from library staff and 42 percent were library faculty. A higher response rate was expected, given the impact of this issue on the library and library users.

[insert Table 1 here]

Table 2 deals with the second question, which asked respondents if they use the online catalog (OSCAR). Eighty-five percent of Group 1 reported that they use the catalog. A small percentage (13 percent) responded that they are not using OSCAR, and 2 percent were not sure. One student commented “Do not use the system—too confusing,” and another stated that they use OSCAR “occasionally, it is not my first thing to use though.”

[insert Table 2 here]

In Group 2, 75 percent indicated that they used OSCAR, 23.2 percent stated that they did not use OSCAR, and 1.8 percent of respondents were not certain. Three of the respondents that selected “yes” also commented that they used OSCAR once or twice, seldom, or very little. One respondent that selected a “no” response indicated that as a student “yes,” but as staff “no.” All comments were made by staff respondents. The

highest rate of OSCAR use came from Group 3. Nearly 99 percent responded that they use OSCAR; however, 1.1 percent indicated that they do not use OSCAR.

Question 3 (Table 3) shows the first drop in Group 1's responses. Only 95 out of 100 respondents in Group 1 completed this question. Eighty-one percent of respondents searched the catalog by title, 77.7 percent search by keyword, 76.8 percent search by author, 35.8 percent search by subject headings, 17.9 percent use call number for searching, and 10.5 percent were not sure how they searched. One student commented that Amazon helps to navigate OSCAR: "Don't hate me, but I often use Amazon.com as a search engine then use OSCAR or OhioLINK to locate the reference."

In Group 2, the most frequently used search is by title (80.0 percent), followed by author (75.6 percent), and then by keyword (68.9 percent). Subject headings were used 42.2 percent of the time followed by call number (11.1 percent).

For Group 3, the respondents indicated they used several ways to search OSCAR. The largest percentage of respondents, 97.7 percent, indicated that they search by title, 94.3 percent search by author, 86.3 percent search by keywords, 79.3 percent search by subject headings, and 86.3 percent search by call number.

The comments received from Group 3 were very helpful in understanding how the catalog is searched. Two respondents commented that they search the catalog using different strategies: "I search the catalog in many different ways depending on what I am trying to find" and "I used whatever helps me find what I want." Some indicated that they search by author and title, and if they do not find the information they need, they search by subject and keyword. "Author and title most frequently, subject next, then keywords." "I usually begin with title/author/call no., but when branching out, will

sometimes pull up the other volumes of series, in case they might be useful.” Others reported that they using author, title, keyword, and call numbers.

Opinions were split in Group 3 on using subject headings in searching. Some users find it very helpful and useful searching by subject heading: “I find subject searching most helpful when working with graduate students after I find one good source it helps me to find others for them.” Others find it less important: “I use all of the above, although subject searching least of all.” Some commented that they are searching by series via title search. Users in Group 3 also search by GovDoc, OCLC number, ISBN, and other call numbers.

[insert Table 3 here]

Question four (Table 4), asking how users search for series in OSCAR, seemed to perplex Group 1 and generated the most comments. Only 75 percent of the 100 students who responded to the survey answered this question. Seventy-two percent of Group 1 indicated that they use the title search to find series, but, later, in question five, 66.6 percent of undergraduates and graduate students combined either did not know or were not sure they could use the title search to find series in OSCAR.

[insert Table 4 here]

The remaining choices for searching for series title were author (52 percent), keyword (49.3 percent), subject heading (22.7 percent), call number (10.7 percent),



and other (4 percent). Most comments showed that the respondents still did not know what a series is. One comment especially showed the confusion over the topic and questions: “I’m not sure what you mean by ‘series.’ Your email was not clear about this either and seemed to be written for librarians or people familiar with the terminology of LC.”

In Group 2, the most frequently used search method for series was title (66 percent), followed by author (46.8 percent), keyword (44.7 percent), and then subject heading (25.5 percent), call number (4.3 percent), and other (2.1 percent). Comments indicated that some respondents did not understand searching by series or did not understand the term “series.”

In asking Group 3 about what kind of search they are conducting since the series does not have a separate index, the majority responded (86.3 percent) that they are using title index to find information, followed by keyword (57.9 percent), followed by author search (25 percent). Searching by subject heading, call number, and other received the smallest percentage.

The comments indicate that library staff use a variety of techniques to find information by series. Some mentioned that they are definitely using the title search to find materials by series. Others indicated that they do a keyword search for keywords in the series titles. Other comments include, “If you know, you can search by using the qualifier which brings up the authority record and any titles in OSCAR, the title search will show all titles and maybe the numbering.” “Sometimes searching by corporate authors helps. Depending on results in ISCA, I also check Ohiolink or OCLC and reverse engineer into OSCAR.” “Series field in MARC record.” “Often I limit to serials.”

Table 5 shows that more respondents in Group 1 did not know they could search by title to find series, 44.4 percent, or were not sure they could search in that way, 22.2 percent, than actually did know they could use a title search as a series search, 33.3 percent. Two student comments typify the confusion over the topic: “I have no idea what this is” and “I am not sure what searching by series is.”

[insert Table 5 here]

From Group 2, 40.8 percent were aware of searching by title to find a series while 51 percent were not aware and 8.2 percent of the respondents were not sure. Since there is no separate index for searching by series, but searching for series can be done through a title search, 88.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they are aware of searching by title when they need information by series. The same number of respondents that use the title search in question four also use the title search in question five. However, 5.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not know that the title index can be used to locate information about series. Another 5.7 percent were not sure if the title index can be searched to find information about series. One comment indicated that the library staff also searches uniform title and series index in staff mode.

In analyzing question five, the large percentage from Group 1 and 2 indicate their unawareness of series searching. This was particularly noticeable in Group 2 where 31.6 percent of faculty and 61.3 of staff indicated their unawareness of searching by series. On the other hand, the concept of searching by series was better understood by Group 3.

In response to question six, 54.6 percent of Group 1 responded that they like the

fact that they can browse through a series, 14.4 percent did not find it useful to browse through the numbers or issues of a series, and 30.9 percent indicated that they were not sure about browsing. A few comments show that Group 1 remain confused about this issue; for example, “If you’re referring to journals as ‘series,’ then yes, I’ve browsed journals from an index of nos/issues of the series after searching a database to find an article of interest.”

For Group 2, of the 49 respondents, 44.9 percent found it useful to browse, 24.5 percent indicated that it was not useful, and 30.6 percent were not sure about browsing. When Group 3 was asked if they find it useful to browse consecutively through all of the number or issues of a series, the largest percentage, 76.7 percent, indicated that they do find it useful. However, 10.5 percent indicated that they do not find it useful to browse consecutively though all of the series numbers, and 12.8 percent were not sure.

Across the 3 groups, Table 6 shows that the largest percentage of the respondents found browsing consecutively through all of the numbers or issue of a series useful. The comments from Group 3 showed uncertainty about the use of browsing consecutively. For example, one respondent commented “sometimes browsing consecutively can be useful and sometime not.” Others indicated that the choice depends on the nature of the series and what the searcher needs to do, and “it is useful but tedious.”

[insert Table 6 here]

Table 7 shows that over half of the students in Group 1 felt that the change to series will affect their use of the catalog (55.7 percent), but a large number were not

sure (40.2 percent). Overall, a majority of respondents from Group 1 believe that LC's decision will impact their research. At this point in the survey, a few students commented on how this new policy will change the way they search: "I believe inconsistency will effect [sic] the usability of the catalog, as inconsistency typically makes use of web-type mediums more confusing." Another student questioned, "if part of a series is listed differently, won't that make searching more difficult?"

[insert Table 7 here]

For Group 2, 57.1 percent believed that the change would affect the usability of the catalog, while 12.2 percent felt that it would not. Just over 30 percent were not sure how it would affect the usability.

Most of the respondents (79.5 percent) in Group 3 indicated that the changes in the current cataloging standards will not allow publications in the same series to be listed in a consistent way and that this will affect the usability of the catalog. However, 2.3 percent indicated that this change will not affect their use of the catalog, and 18.2 percent were not sure if this change of not controlling series will or will not affect the usability of the catalog.

In summary, all three groups responded that LC's decision will affect the usability of the catalog. This was particularly highlighted in Group 3's responses. Several comments from librarians and library staff pointed to the negative impact of not controlling series, not only on catalogers, but also on collection development and reference services. For example, one respondent mentioned, "And not just for reference,

but also for collection development.” Another said, “it will be confusing to catalogers and users if the same series are not consistent.” Another commented that, “I think we will see less accessibility and overall knowledge of what parts of a series we own.”

Group 1’s response to question eight, asking if they are willing to browse through multiple screens, mirrored their confusion over other questions. They were almost evenly split three ways regarding this question; 34 percent say they would browse several screens, but 33 percent say they would not. The 33 percent who were not sure were most likely still confused by the series issue.

For Group 2, 46.9 percent of respondents would view several screens to find information they need, 26.5 percent indicated they would not, and 26.5 percent were not sure. Comments made by the respondents were, “will do what is needed to get info but don’t like going screen to screen”; “if I had to”; “if I know what I am looking for, yes; if just looking for info on a particular topic, may not look through multiple screens”; “I would only look through a few”; “this would be annoying, inconvenient”; “no, unless I have no choice”; and “that sounds like too much trouble.”

In Group 3, 71.8 percent of the respondents were willing to browse through several screens to obtain the information they need, if that is the only way to obtain that information. Six point four percent indicated that they would not take the time to browse, and 21.8 percent were not sure. Once again, Group 1 and 2’s respondents showed confusion in understanding question eight. This was clear from their comments. For example, one respondent from Group 1 commented that they would find browsing “very annoying” and another stated that browsing would “depend on how much I need that material.”

A number of interesting comments arose from this question from Group 3. Several respondents felt that an extra searching effort would be required to satisfy the needs of the users. Competition of the library catalog with the search engines was on the mind of those who were willing to go the extra mile for their patrons; “Willing to do whatever it takes to help a patron” was a typical comment of this group.

[insert Table 8 here]

Table 9 shows that 52 percent of Group 1 felt the loss of tracing would be harmful to their research after viewing the example of a series traced and not traced. Although 11.2 percent said that it would not harm their research, 36.7 percent indicated that they were not sure if this would impact their research. Comments by respondents reinforced the idea that the loss of tracing would be time consuming, and, therefore, harmful to their research.

[insert Table 9 here]

Of the 48 respondents for Group 2, 37.5 percent believed that a loss of organization would be harmful to research. Twenty-five percent believed that it would not be, and 37.5 percent were not sure of the effect. In Group 3, 59.5 percent felt that combining series into a single list would constitute a loss of organization that would be harmful for searching. A small number (8.3 percent) did not foresee this as a problem; however, a large number (32.1 percent) were not sure of the impact.

In responding to question nine, there was an agreement among the three groups that if series do not display by publisher or place of publication, this way of organization will be harmful to their research. This negative impact was felt most among Group 1 and 3. For example, some comments from Group 1 said, “It would waste more time in locating resources” and “...it would take much longer to search through haphazardly arranged series.” Some respondents from Group 3 commented by saying, “qualification of series title by publisher is very important in distinguishing lengthy runs of different series with same title” and “I find series search so impossible the way it is now that I do not see how any change can make it any worse. I just search and search and search until I find the information I need.” These comments showed that users are currently experiencing problems in the catalog and any change in series might make it worse.

#### <1>Decision

As seen from the survey results, the number of respondents was very small. The authors did not receive significant information to indicate how the LC's decision would impact the accessibility of series from the online system. The only significant results were received from the library group. Since this was not enough to make a concrete decision, the Cataloging Department temporarily decided to continue the status quo. Catalogers will continue to create new SARs when performing original cataloging so that original records will include a controlled series.

Backstage Library Works provides reports for unmatched series, series not in the

authority file, any errors in tagging, typos, and so on. Until now, these reports were a low priority because of the shortage of staff. These reports will now be examined in a timely manner, and series will be corrected in OSCAR on a monthly basis. In some cases, the master record in OCLC will be also corrected, and this will be based on the judgment of the catalogers.

Public services requests to clean up a series or to create a new authority record for a series if this series is causing problems or confusion in searching for patrons will remain a priority. The Cataloging Department is not planning to automatically check, verify, and control every uncontrolled series. This decision might change in the future, as more series will not be controlled. An examination of this approach will be done in the future to measure the impact of this decision on controlling series, user satisfaction, and if any further problems arise. Special attention will be given to the vendor reports on series.

Results of the survey received from the user communities, including university undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff, and librarians and library staff, indicate that there is no urgent need to drastically change OSUL's practice in order to control series. The librarians and staff who responded to the questionnaire, however, urged the control of series, because this will affect their work in serving the campus community.

## <1>Conclusion

As shown from the survey, the response rate in Group 1 and Group 2 was low



and did not provide enough information to consider the impact the LC series decision would have on those particular groups to access library materials. Even the response rate from Group 3 was not what the authors expected, but it provided enough information on certain needs for controlling series. For example, from the comments received from Group 3, many library staff are urging a continuation of series authority control and would like to see more retrospective clean-up. Comments on this need were also received from outside of the Cataloging Department in acquisitions, reference, and collection development.

The survey was intended to be used to measure the level of discontent with the LC decision on series and to also measure the impact on OSUL Cataloging workflow. Given the responses from users of the catalog in the three categories, the Cataloging Department decided to take a moderate approach and to address series issues as they are reported by the users or the reports generated by vendors. The authors will follow up in a future study on measuring the impact of their decision and will take a different approach that could include creating a series of focus groups that would train selected users from the campus on series and examine how they are using series as a search strategy.

The OSUL study may be useful to other libraries because it takes a different approach based on users' perspective of the catalog and how users search the catalog. Although the input from users' was not sufficient to make a decision, the study is considered to be unique because the decision attempted to involve the users and not only the Cataloging Department. The attempt to gain insight from users was not as useful as hoped; however, user comments were informative and raised awareness within the library of users' lack of understanding of searching and indexing.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Please identify yourself (check all that apply).

☐ Faculty      ☐ Library Faculty      ☐ Library Staff  
☐ Staff      ☐ Graduate Student      ☐ Undergraduate

2. Do you use the Ohio State University Library catalog (OSCAR)?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Not sure

3. How do you search OSCAR? Check all that apply.

☐ Title

☐ Author

☐ Keyword

☐ Subject heading

☐ Call number

☐ Not sure

4. There is no separate index for searching by series in OSCAR. What kind of search do you do instead when trying to find items that are in a series?

☐ Title

☐ Author

☐ Keyword

☐ Subject heading

☐ Call number

☐ Other

5. Are you aware that searching by series can be done through a title search?

☐ Yes

No

Not sure

6. Do you find it useful to browse consecutively through all of the numbers or issues of a series?

Yes

No

Not sure

7. Current standards are changing so that publications in the same series may not be listed in a consistent way. Will that effect the usability of the catalog?

Yes

No

Not sure

8. If the publications you are searching for by series are spread over multiple screens, would you be willing to browse several screens?

Yes

No

Not sure

9. Different publishers might use the same title for series. If these were combined in a single list, rather than displayed by publisher or place of publication, is this loss of organization harmful to your research? In order to answer the question, please view the examples below of a controlled and uncontrolled series. For a controlled series click OSCAR: OSCAR. For an uncontrolled series click OhioLINK: OhioLINK.

## Appendix B: Survey invitation

I am writing to ask you to participate in a very brief survey on the impact of Library of Congress (LC) decision to cease creating series authority records on our library catalog. This survey will be open until 10PM May 9, 2007.

On April 20, 2006, LC announced to the library community that on May 1st 2006, it would cease creating series authority records as part of the LC cataloging. This decision came as a shock to the library community. LC's decision left libraries puzzling with many questions—Library of Congress was the largest library contributing series authority control records—this means, the bulk of series works will either be shifted to the library community or ignored. Libraries are left to decide to either continue series authority control on their own so that a collection within a series can be displayed together, or to follow LC's decision.

At OSUL, we were relying on LC and other libraries to do series authority control. Thus, we were not heavily contributing records to the Series Authority Control File. With this decision in place, we will have many series in our catalog that need to be controlled.

This brief survey is intended to address the question of how LC's decision impacts your ability to search the catalog by series. Your response will help us to determine whether to continue series authority control and contribute more records to the LC Series Authority file or simply follow LC's decision. There are only nine questions which should take fewer than five minutes to reply.

If you prefer, I would be happy to send a paper copy in the mail so that it could be



completed without using electronic communications, or to send the survey as an e-mail attachment. In any case, the responses will be kept confidential.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this survey, and I thank you in advance for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any specific questions.

Here is a link to the survey:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?A=191058635E86732>

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further e-mails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/r.asp?A=191058635E86732>